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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 002033

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: THE NEXT ROUND OF ARRESTS?

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d
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SUMMARY

1 (C) A Caracas prosecutor has called Juan Fernandez, leader of Gente de Petroleo (anti-Chavez group composed of fired PDVSA employees), to testify June 17 as a suspect on unspecified charges relating to the 2002 national strike. Victor Ferreres, president of Venevision testified June 15 about the weapons found by the DISIP (Political Police) on a Venevision property June 12, which prosecutors are trying to tie to the paramilitary case. Prosecutors have also called Leonardo Carvajal of the education NGO Asamblea de Educacion to testify on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the government for receiving funds from the National Endowment for Democracy. DISIP agents also visited the leader of a human rights NGO that was recently had a grant approved from the US Agency for International Development, seeking information about the funding of his organization. End Summary

Juan Fernandez

12. (U) A Caracas prosecutor informed Juan Fernandez, leader of Gente de Petroleo (anti-Chavez group composed of fired PDVSA employees) and member of the G-5 (a group of senior opposition figures), that he was a suspect in an investigation involving the national strike in 2002. Fernandez is due to testify on June 17. The prosecutor is the same one who sought to detain Fernandez and other ex-officials of PDVSA last year on charges of treason for their role as leaders of the national strike in 2002. At that time a Caracas appeals court rejected the arrest warrant issued by a lower court. According to newspaper reports, the evidence in the case consists of hundreds of pictures of empty gas stations, and technical reports of accidents at PDVSA installations, but no proof of the individual responsibility of any of the strike leaders in any alleged acts of sabotage.

Venevision

13. (U) Victor Ferreres, president of Venevision, testified as a witness in the military court investigating the case of alleged Colombian paramilitaries captured May 9 outside Caracas. This followed the discovery by DISIP (Political Police) agents of some old firearms on a property leased by Venevision. Ferreres told reporters that he was satisfied with the way the testimony went, and was confident the case would be resolved satisfactorily.

NED and AID Grantees

14. (C) Caracas prosecutors have also called Leonardo Carvajal, member of the educational reform NGO Asamblea de Educacion, to testify about funding his group received from the National Endowment for Democracy. The investigation is reportedly similar to the process against SUMATE, involving charges of conspiracy against the GOV. DISIP agents questioned Carlos Alberto Nieto Palma June 6. Nieto is the head of Una Ventana a la Libertad, a human rights group, which just had a grant approved from the US Agency for International Development. Nieto told PAS FSN June 11 that the agents arrived at his home without a court order. They questioned him about his work defending alleged victims of torture at the hands of Venezuelan security services, and about receiving funds from the USG. Nieto reports the agents then asked him questions about his family and work, which he took to be warnings that the DISIP knew his movements and those of his family.

Comment

16. (C) The GOV is ramping up a judicial offensive by reopening the case against Fernandez at the same time there is a case against SUMATE and a widening paramilitary investigation. Precedent shows that these cases may lead to detentions with relatively little evidence, which may in turn leave political leaders out of action for long periods of time. The opening of an investigation against Asamblea de Educacion gives cover to the SUMATE case, by arguing that the cases really are for violation of funding rules, and not political intimidation. The visit to Nieto, who heads a respected human rights NGO, indicates a more aggressive posture by DISIP, intended to intimidate groups who are monitoring the actions of Venezuelan security forces.
SHAPIRO

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